

Interim Report on the Health and Sanitary Circumstances
of the Urban District of Wellington for the Year 1939.

In the latter part of the year changed conditions of national life had a marked effect on the existing programme of health advancement and the normal routine of practice was disturbed considerably. Progress which was associated with structural change had to be restricted and retarded and in some cases stopped completely. Schemes which had almost arrived at the stage of fruition had to be abandoned; it is to be hoped for a time only. When major health enterprises were given up it was confidently expected that the daily work of the department would be able to be carried on uninterruptedly but emergency conditions calling for the reception of evacuees threw additional strain on the sanitary staff and some slight disorganisation resulted for a period. While it would seem inevitable that the staff must be prepared to meet certain eventualities as they arise it must always be the aim to return to normal procedure as quickly as circumstances will permit.

POPULATION. The chief change in this occurred immediately following the outbreak of hostilities when the town was required to receive school-children from the Smethwick District of Birmingham. The ingenuity of the Billetting Officer was taxed to the utmost and after the initial settlement the frequency of changes was a constant source of difficulty. Many reasons were given for the necessity for rebilletting and much anxiety and labour would have been avoided if the Officer had had at his disposal a home where children could have been received to tide them over the difficult periods which were frequently of short duration. The want of a hostel was much felt. A home of this nature would have functioned when:- foster parents had to go away from home for one reason or another, when minor ailments of a contagious nature affected the inmates and partial segregation was required, when nervous and difficult children were in need of special care, when school circumstances called for a special consideration for the scholar and where conditions calling for a removal from the receiving home for a limited period occurred. The hostel would have acted as a clearing house.

The class of child brought to the district was satisfactory; many being of the secondary school type and able to do much for themselves in the home. The foster parents responded well to the demands made on them. Many went to considerable extremes to rehouse the evacuees in comfort and much attention was given to the care and social well-being of the new-comers.

With Wellington the centre for local industries and developments, labour has had to be accommodated, to a large extent in lodgings and it would be difficult to use the results of the 1936 survey as an index of the dispersal of the population in the area as it is today. The social life of the town attracts many of the people living in the near and more distant neighbourhood; Wellington being able to cater for the demands in a way not met with except in the larger towns of the district. This has resulted in a great increase in daily population, and, at certain periods, some congestion.

Laboratory Facilities. An emergency health laboratory has been established in the Science Department of the Wrekin College and its staff have been very helpful in carrying out investigations on the causes of certain illnesses.

AMBULANCE FACILITIES. The number of vehicles has been increased to meet the requirements of the local A.R.P.

PUBLIC BATHS. These have been used more than in normal years as, owing to deficiencies in local sanitation, troops stationed in the neighbourhood have made them a centre for cleansing purposes. This deficiency might have been easily overcome by the construction of some type of shower apparatus.

Civilian Deaths due to War Operations. A scheme has been provisionally approved by the Ministry to retain a building to be used as an emergency mortuary should the occasion arise.

WATER SUPPLIES. These are kept under constant supervision and are examined at regular intervals.

Samples from the Wrekin source gave unsatisfactory results in Midsummer and the supply had to be discontinued temporarily. To remedy defects the depth of sand in the filter beds was increased and a lower head of water was maintained: in addition, channels leading from the gathering grounds were cleaned out. After repeated samplings the required degree of purity was again obtained and the use of the supply resumed.

HOUSING. After the completion of the Arleston Estate further rehousing by new building has had to be abandoned by the Council. Clearance Schemes, in process of completion, have been held over and such houses as might be dealt with by individual demolition are being considered as local housing vacancies arise.

During the year successful action was taken against persons in moveable dwellings who had stayed stationary beyond the prescribed period without obtaining a licence.

MEAT and FOOD INSPECTION. The Sanitary Inspector gave his usual careful attention to the supervision of slaughter-houses and the regular examination of all animal carcasses: this included, not only carcasses meant for consumption, but also casualties brought into the town to be dealt with.

Premises to be used for the preparation of foods were given special attention.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES. From a survey of cases of notifiable disease registered in the year it is to be noted that there has been a generalised decrease. This diminution is most marked in the case of Diphtheria; there being less than one case every two months on average. This satisfactory result may be ascribed to the concerted attack made on the disease by means of protection of the child by immunisation. The full benefit of the scheme, started in 1936, is beginning to be felt. To maintain this high degree of freedom the work must be continued: particular attention being paid to school entrants and those under that age.

The presence of infectious disease in a local residential school at the time of the beginning of their vacation necessitated a considerable amount of clerical work in order that the districts where the pupils had their homes might be notified that contact case of infectious disease were being moved to them. The Sanitary Inspector kindly undertook this work.

New regulations, governing the notification of Measles and Whooping Cough and making them compulsorily notifiable, were instituted in the last months of the year. At the end of 1939 measles was epidemic in the district but no cases of whooping cough had been brought to notice. A number of transferred cases and temporary residents suffering from tuberculosis have come into the area and they may remain until such time as a readjustment of civil life will permit their return to their homes.

13.8.40.

(Signed) W.A.M. Stewart.

Medical Officer of Health.